





ADVICE,

ADDRESSED TO THE

LOWER RANKS OF SOCIETY;

Useful at all Times, more especially in the present.

SECOND EDITION.

..«»..
BY W. BURDON, A. M.

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A D V I C E,

&c. &c.

MY FRIENDS,

THE world ever has been, and most probably ever will be, divided into different ranks and stations; and did each rank know its duty and its advantages; this division could not be attended with hardship to any; because each having enough for its wants, there could be no ground of complaint. All ranks are in some degree dependent on each other, but you are the most independent of all, for you have nothing to trust to but your own exertions, and these must always secure you ease and comfort, if you are prudent, industrious, and sober; and if not, you have none but yourselves to blame: by these means, if you are desirous of it, you may better your condition, and gradually rise to a higher rank in society; and if you are content with your own, you may enjoy many blessings which are not to be purchased by riches. The rich have nothing further to look to which can add to their happiness; they may desire and possess more honours, more

pleasures, and more wealth, but these will make them no happier; for employment and health are the best preservers of happiness, and these are the companions of a humble station. Riches often produce weariness and disgust, for want of active employment either of body or mind; and health is often ruined by licentious indulgence. Think not, my friends, that I am attempting to deceive you, by an endeavour to reconcile you to poverty and misery, that others may enjoy, undisturbed, all the advantages of wealth and pleasure: I despise such paltry arts; I have never condescended to varnish over a lie to serve any party, or any purpose whatever; my only wish is to improve your condition, and then to make you content with it, by taking a fair estimate of the different stations in life, and to shew how you may increase the benefits of that in which you are placed. I repeat it again: you are the most independent rank in society; for labour is the best sort of property, and he who can labour may, if he pleases, possess health, content, and comfort: all these are in your own power, but you may throw them away, and then you will become dependent upon others for your support; but if you are prudent, you need not labour to excess, and you need never be poor. “How can this be?” you will say—“tell us how this is possible, and we will be for ever indebted to you.” The answer is very short: by giving to

mankind the gift of reason, Providence has given to every man the means of providing for his own interest and happiness, and it is only when he surrenders his reason to the will of others, or neglects to exercise it, that he can become miserable and distressed. Reason is the same in all men, and equally tends to the happiness of all; but if we suffer other people to think for us, they will most probably think only of themselves; for there is a constant desire in mankind to oppress each other when they are permitted. The interest of each man, well understood, is the interest of all; it is only when some-ranks take too much, that the happiness of others is disturbed. Reason need not be equally cultivated in all men, but it ought to be so in proportion to each man's rank in society: to be able to reason on his duty and his interest, is not beyond the reach of the poorest individual, and is to him more useful than the highest efforts of the learned.

For some time past you have heard much about equality, and many of you have most probably supposed it to mean equality of property: you might just as well suppose it to mean a constant equality of day and night, or that the sun should shine equally in all countries; for it is not more impossible, than that all men should have an equal share of property. The labourer is worthy of his hire, and the rich man hath a right to the inheri-

ance of his ancestors ; and this makes them equal, or rather it gives an advantage to the former ; for a man may by various means be deprived of his fortune, but, in a civilized country, nothing but ill health can deprive him of his labour ; and then, if he has been prudent, he will not be without support ; for a small sum saved from his earnings, and added to that of others, may secure him against the dangers of poverty. The great lesson which I am anxious to impress on your minds, is, to trust to nothing but yourselves, for it is by this means only that you can be happy and independent. You have often heard, and most probably felt, that there is a strong disposition in your superiors to oppress and ill-treat you : I will not deny that this very frequently happens, but not more frequently than in other cases where men find they have the power to do good or evil, as they please. The means of guarding against such oppression is in your own power ; for labour is the great stock and capital of the community, and though the produce or interest is chiefly reaped by others, yet the fund itself is in your hands, and if you are careful, you may always secure a sufficient share of the interest : your wages may always be more than equal to your support, if you take care to acquire a sufficient degree of skill and industry.

There is another point also well worth your con-

sideration, and perhaps the most important of the whole; it relates to your moral state, or the degree of prudence requisite to secure your health and interest. Like the rest of your fellow-creatures, you are gifted by nature with certain passions and propensities, which even in a state of nature you could not fully indulge without injury to yourselves and others, much more so in a state of society; for men being there brought nearer each other by their wants and pleasures, than in an uncivilized state, where the savage is almost an independent being, it is impossible that any man should destroy his own health and happiness, without in some measure affecting that of others. All virtues and vices are to be estimated by the good or evil they produce, for most actions are indifferent in themselves, and are only to be judged of by their consequences; but the consequences of some are more immediate and more evident than of others, and therefore those actions are more easily pronounced to be right or wrong. To warn you against the consequences of theft and murder, either to yourselves or others, is totally needless, for they cannot be doubted: there are other actions whose effects are not so sudden, and therefore not so easily perceived, yet they are not less certain and destructive to individuals and society. Should you be tempted to employ your hours of leisure in playing at games of chance, in which your minds

will no doubt be agitated and amused by the hopes of gain and the dread of losing, whether you win or lose you will inevitably be doing an injury to your selves and families; for, in the latter case, you must be throwing away that money which, if carefully kept together, might be the means of educating your infants, and, at some future period, when you are no longer able to labour, might be the means of supporting you in sickness, and preserving you from poverty. On the other hand, if you win, the money so gained must be taken from others, who will then be exposed to the evils which I have just mentioned, and of which you become in some measure the occasion. Another consequence attending even your success, is, that idle habits being once acquired, the money so got is generally spent in folly and extravagance, instead of being saved to any useful purpose: at any rate, however, the time spent in gaming might be more properly employed in improving the mind, in instructing your young families, or in some other innocent recreation, which might increase instead of destroying both spirits and health. By drinking to excess, you injure both your minds and bodies, and render yourselves incapable of that exertion which men of sober habits and sound bodies are always equal to: you corrupt your blood, and thus bring upon yourselves and families a train of diseases which you shudder to behold in others: you create

distress and misery to your unhappy wives, who are generally the sufferers by your drunken freaks: you frequently spend that money in a few hours, which it has cost you months of hard labour to acquire: you are constantly liable to be imposed upon by artful people, who take advantage of a man when they find he is unable to defend or take care of himself; and what is worse than all, you set an example to your children which is often the cause of their future misconduct and misery. On every consideration, therefore, of reason and prudence, you will avoid the destructive vices of gaming and drinking, for you will by that means preserve yourselves at all times in such a state to follow your different employments, as will secure to you independence and plenty; for it is only by your vices and passions that you render yourselves dependent on your superiors for support: when you give them labour for their money, you are independent of them; but when you reduce yourselves and families to poverty by your imprudence, you are compelled to take money from them without giving any thing in return; you are then brought to a miserable state of dependence, either on occasional charity or parish allowance.

The indulgence of one passion above all others subjects you to the charge of imprudence, and to the necessity of having your families, at least, sup-

ported by your richer superiors. The propensity to a commerce between the sexes is the most natural and useful of all our passions, yet even this requires to be restrained within proper bounds, for, like all others, when too frequently indulged, it is the cause of vice and misery; when it is gratified in lawless pleasure, it is the source of infinite calamity, and produces loathsome diseases both to yourselves and your posterity: but even when submitted to the restraints of law and decency, it is frequently attended with distress and poverty; for whoever marries before he has provided the means of supporting a family, is the cause of misery both to himself and them, and renders both dependent upon others for support, which no human being has a right to expect from any but himself or his relatives. Society is not bound to remedy any man's imprudence, though charity may sometimes stretch forth her hand to relieve distress; but every man does or ought to take upon himself the consequences of his own misconduct, and not to draw upon the funds of others to supply his necessity. Nature has sent enough to feed us all, if we do not invite too many to the feast: a poor man ought to be as much under the restraints of prudence as a rich one, and many a man, even in affluent circumstances, is prevented from indulging his natural propensity to marriage, by the consideration of the difficulties in which he will most

likely involve both himself and others, by not having those means of support which are adequate to his rank in society. Some, however, carry this too far, and instead of comfort, think only of luxury. Endeavour to estimate the satisfaction of being fed, cloathed, and attended when sick, at your own homes, in preference to being dragged to work-houses and poorhouses—in preference to being casted to a common receptacle of filth and misery, where, under the severe inspection of overseers and task-masters, you may be compelled to drudge for others without reward, and to labour without receiving the fruit of your industry. Many of you, I believe, have a proper abhorrence of such habitations, and you will do well to retain it, provided it leads you to the means of avoiding the necessity of coming to them at last: think then on the comforts you may enjoy at home, surrounded by your own family, who are most likely to be tender to you, affectionate and dutiful; and even if you are without a family, compare the pleasures of a home with the miseries of a house of industry, which is in general a house of cruelty; and remember, that the only means of avoiding such a resource, are economy and continence. Forbear for a few years to indulge your natural propensity to procreation, and you may then maintain a moderate family without burthen or difficulty; and take care also to provide for the advance of old

age, by laying up a certain sum, to be entrusted to any of those societies which government have so wisely protected and promoted, and which may in time, by your increasing prudence and frugality, supercede that odious, oppressive, and ~~degenerating~~ heap of cruelty and nonsense, called the poor laws; when they are rendered obsolete, it will be a happy day for England. May that time not be remote! for these laws have had a great effect in bending you to the yoke of poverty, and by affording a slight subsistence, have reconciled you to misery, filth, and dependence; thus depriving you of all those energies by which the mind of man exerts itself towards improvement, and checking that propensity which every man of spirit feels to better his condition when under the pressure of great difficulty.

Whenever you are disposed to be discontented with your condition, be careful to examine how far it arises from your own imprudence, and how far from the injustice of others. Your vices and follies are your own—these you can impute to none but yourselves. I will not however say, that you suffer nothing from your superiors, yet certainly nothing which it is not in your own power to remedy by the single virtue of prudence. When you think those above you so much richer than yourselves, endeavour to be certain of the fact, for it is not money that constitutes riches, but the proportion which money bears to our wants, real or imaginary. It

is of great service to every man to be well acquainted with the rest of society.

Virtue and vice is a mere matter of calculation; how much we gain or lose by any particular mode of conduct forms the whole of the account, and the balance is happiness or misery: calculate then how much trouble, poverty, and filth you will hazard for the gratification of a sensual appetite, or even of a lawful passion, and compare it with the comfort you may finally enjoy by exercising for a while the virtue of continence, and deferring to marry till you can afford to maintain a family: look at those around you who have hastily involved themselves in difficulties by too early an indulgence ~~of~~ matrimony, in and compare the distressing sight of a poor man with a large family in dirt and rags, and little better than savages, with the decent comforts of one with a moderate offspring, well clothed, cleanly and well behaved, enjoying the fruits of their labour in a comfortable cottage or apartment; happy among themselves—satisfied with their lot—and though not rich, yet having more than riches—content and health. Remember that these comforts are within every man's reach, and depend solely on yourselves; the wages of labour in many places are perhaps hardly equal at the present period to procure you all the comforts you might expect, and those of you who already have families must endeavour, by the

strictest frugality, to meet the difficulty; and you have many examples of it, even in the ranks above you, who are hard pressed at present to live in the method they have been used to. You who are yet unmarried may avoid the evil, and restrain your propensities till you are better able to support a family. When I give you this advice, I do not recommend any means which are not sanctioned by prudence and virtue; for to live single, and to live in vice, is worse than to marry to poverty*.

One of the greatest causes of poverty in all highly-cultivated countries, is the excess of population above the means of support, for the more mouths there are to be filled, the fewer can the provisions of the country supply with comforts; in such a case, the money given by the rich will raise the price of provisions, without much improving the condition of the poor: I repeat it then again, that the interest of the poor is to avoid multiplying too fast, and no maxim of prudence can so effectually promote their happiness, as to prevent early marriage; keep down your numbers, and you will always command wages more than equal to your immediate support, and you may then save enough, which, if joined to the savings of others, may pre-

* The argument drawn from the principle of population, I acknowledge to have borrowed from the ingenious essay of Mr. Malthus, lately published.

serve you from accepting the scanty pittance of parish bounty. Labour, like every other commodity, falls in price when there is too much of it in the market. This advice may not be relished by merchants and manufacturers, but depend upon it, it is for the good of all ranks in the community; for though the higher ones may pay a little more for it in wages, they will ultimately find their advantage in the security they must derive from the lower ranks being better acquainted with their duty and their interest, and consequently more content with their station in society; and they who are sincere in their wishes for bettering the condition of the poor, cannot surely grudge a small advance in the price of that labour which is in general so badly paid at present. The ignorance of the multitude is the food of rebellion, and there are no better materials for artful demagogues to work upon, than a degraded populace.

The common objection against your having great wages may be here urged with considerable force; and the fact will not be denied, that, without you have learned the method of employing them properly, high wages only afford temptations to indolence and vice; for they who can earn their week's subsistence in three days, often spend the remainder in drunkenness and debauchery. Wherever this is the case, great wages are an evil both

to the employers and the employed; for they lessen the quantity of work done, and the ability of him that performs it; they diminish the profits of the master, without adding to the comforts of the servant; and they tend to the general corruption of the lower ranks of society. To those who do not know how to employ them, great wages, therefore, are a great evil. Let me advise you, then, to acquire, for your own sakes, and for the sake of others, sober and virtuous habits: whatever leisure is afforded you, employ it in the cultivation of your reason, or in harmless recreation; read useful and intelligent books; look around you on the condition of your fellow-creatures; converse with nature and with man; attach yourselves to some spot of earth when you can procure it, to cultivate for your use or amusement; learn to take pleasure in the beauty of flowers, or the virtues of plants and herbs, but never amuse yourselves with cruelty towards any living thing whatever; it is beneath the dignity, and unworthy the generosity of man, and resembles only those fiercer animals who delight in the torture of each other. Whether your leisure be long or short, take care that it be innocently and harmlessly filled up, for indolence is the nurse of all vice; the mind or the body must always be at work in a greater or lesser degree, and some sorts of employment are certainly comparative leisure. The reve-

nue may suffer if the alehouses are empty, but the state will be a gainer by the health and virtue of its members: it is short-sighted wisdom which promotes private vices for the sake of public good. Cultivate habits of temperance and economy, and you need never look to any one but yourselves for support—learn above all things to be ambitious of cleanliness, and to take a pride ~~of~~ being neat and comfortable; it is the best proof and preservative of virtue, for vice and ignorance are always filthy, shameless, and indecent. *in*

Nothing renders the mind of man so prone to the lower vices as poverty, and nothing so degrades him in the eyes of others; for the man who is without the means of subsistence, is supposed to have so little to attach him to the world, as to be capable of any undertaking, however base or desperate. A numerous population is the great cause of poverty; let him, therefore, who wishes for himself and his offspring to avoid this most abject state, forbear to bring beings into the world for whom it cannot provide. Remember that you compose the great body of society, and that therefore more depends on your regular and sober conduct than on that of all the rest: if you mispend your time, waste your health, or misapply your money, the whole must be out of joint; but if you regulate your lives by the rules of prudence and morality, you will not only be happy

in yourselves, but by giving a lesson of virtue to your superiors, will teach them that riches are not requisite either to happiness or virtue. Your present ignorance, it will be said, is the fault of those who have it in their power to instruct you; but it is not less your own fault, if the means of instruction are within your reach. It is not any great stretch of intellect that is required of you; all that is needful is to reason upon your relative station, to consider what are the means of promoting your happiness, and how greatly foresight, economy, and moderation, contribute to render you comfortable and contented; and that the great moral duties which are required of you, are those which conduce to your honest prosperity: remember, above all, that to give life to a being you cannot provide for, is almost as great a breach of morality as to take it away; for to bring a creature into the world only to be wretched, is an unnatural offence. Whenever population presses too hard on the means of subsistence, there must be misery, and this is the fault of those who increase their families thoughtlessly. Should you be tempted to murmur at the necessity of laying a restraint on your natural appetites, you will murmur not at man, but at God; for it is as much conformable to the laws of nature that excessive population should produce excessive misery, as that fire should burn, or bread should nourish.

The happiness of which you are capable is all I am advising you to aim at, and when each man expects no more than belongs to him, all will be right. Some things there are, particularly in our sister country, which government may do to better your condition, and give you a fuller possession of your rights; but these things you will be more likely to obtain by shewing you are prepared to receive them, than by tumult and violence. I am not recommending servile submission to injustice, but a firm and moderate demand of your rights: there are, however, few things by which your condition can be improved, which are not in your own power; and when you are convinced of this, you will lose no time to act as becomes your interest. I am not attempting to reconcile you to poverty, rags, or filth; I only wish to excite you to procure the comforts consistent with your station, and by doing so, to make you content and peaceful. The enjoyments of the rich may be more exquisite and more expensive than yours, and they may be more refined, but they are not more numerous; for nature has been equally kind to both, though art has created a difference. You may enjoy as well as them the pleasures of a family, of the senses, of the appetites, of reason, and of nature; you may have your amusements, which though simple, may give your equal delight with the greatest luxuries of art: what you lose, there,

fore, is not equal to what you possess ; you can have none of the restless and weary cravings of a pampered appetite, arising from indolence of body and emptiness of mind, for you are, or ought to be, constantly employed either at home or abroad : in whatever humble station, therefore, you are placed, study to do your duty, and to consult your interest consistently with truth and honesty, and you can never be unhappy but by those misfortunes from which no station is exempt ; and even that unhappiness, by the exertion of your reason, and by a return to your usual employments, cannot be of long duration ; and if you keep your bodies in a proper state of health by constant temperance, there is no distemper which can afflict you for any long period. Let it not be supposed that when I talk to you of your independence, I meant you should by that means be acquitted from all decent respect to those whom the chances of society have placed in a condition above you ; I meant not that surly independence which shews itself in coarseness of manner and rudeness of address. A man may be thoroughly independent in his principles and station, and yet not refuse to acknowledge others superior to him by their rank, their office, or their talents ; and this respect is thoroughly consistent with a manly dignity of behaviour, which despises the crouching servility of a slave, and dares to stand erect in the presence of a great man. Men of the higher ranks re-

use not to shew that degree of respect and civility to each other which sweetens the intercourse of society, surely then those whom chance has placed at the bottom should not neglect to pay external deference to those who may require it by any of the claims above mentioned. Hitherto I have endeavoured to shew you how you may be content and happy by moderate enjoyments; he who does more is not your friend, and he who does less is your enemy; for you have a right to a share in the comforts of the world, and I have told you how they may be acquired.

Having said thus much to you on your general state, I will address you for a while on the particular circumstances of the county we dwell in, and what is required of you in the present contest. To those among you who hang so loose upon society, as hardly to have a living and hardly a home, I will not venture to address myself with any confidence: the country has little claim to their support, as they can hardly be worse by any change of circumstances; yet it is possible that, by conducting themselves with spirit and generosity in the present contest, they may obtain a share of those comforts which they have either forfeited by vice or missed by poverty. To you, however, who are able to procure by your labour a decent maintenance, and are not without a home, a family, and friends, I will endeavour shortly to state how far you are interested in supporting the present state of things, and how much you have to

lose by the success of our inveterate enemy. To those among you who have formed any false and idle hopes of being bettered by a successful invasion of the French, I must say, Look at the state of Switzerland and Holland, two countries in which the condition of the lower ranks was formerly more to be envied than in any part of Europe; what are they now? wretched, miserable, and enslaved; their cottages destroyed, the sources of their industry torn up by the roots, and themselves in many places compelled to feed on acorns and wild fruit. The boasted declaration of the French, "war to the palace and peace to the cottage," has been completely falsified, for the only equality they have introduced has been equality of wretchedness to both, and equal misery to all. The poor in these nations no longer labour for themselves or their country; the fruit of their industry is swept away by the rapacity of the French, to cover the expences of the Chief Consul, and to make up for what he has wrung from his own subjects to squander on his pomp and parade; and can you expect to be better treated than these countries have been? No: he has the same ground of quarrel against you as against them, you are the natives of a free country. I will not attempt to terrify your imagination with relating to you the rapes, murders, massacres, cruelties, and enormities of all sorts, which we have been told will be perpetrated by the French; it is sufficient for you to conceive

the general horrors attendant upon war, from which neither you nor any part of the country will be exempt. Should you ever have supposed that, in case of an overthrow, you may change places with your superiors, what will you gain by it, supposing it to be possible, which I will presently shew you is utterly ridiculous? When placed in a station, and promoted to affluence, which you have never been used to enjoy, and were never prepared by education or habit to act in, can you suppose that you will be more happy than you are now, when every thing around you is become familiar by custom and long use; where the friends, the company, the manner of living, are all such as you are used to, and therefore feel yourselves at ease with? Riches, instead of being a blessing, are a curse to those who do not know how to employ them; and even those who are born to them, without being properly educated, are worse for them rather than better; what, then, must they be to you who have never been taught how to enjoy them, and are too old to learn to any good purpose? Banish the ridiculous idea, and be content with the station wherein you are placed, for, depend upon it, you will make an awkward figure in a higher, and depend also, that the enemies with whom you have to contend are too greedy and too hungry to leave you any share in the plunder; they will rather make you the servants of servants, and the slaves of slaves, than raise you to any station of power or wealth.

Enquire of those who are best qualified to inform you, whether there is any instance, either in ancient or modern times, of the multitude having ever profited by revolution and tumult? Be satisfied, there is none; for even when they are permitted to have a share in the plunder of their superiors, the advantages derived from such gain are short and transitory; for when the foundations of society are overturned, it is a long time before they can be laid afresh, and most of those who partake in the destruction never survive its horrid effects. It is a foolish wish to hope to live by plunder, for that sort of life cannot last long: when you cut down the tree to come at the fruit, you can enjoy it but once, and that is soon over; it is your interest to preserve it, and make it flourish; it may shoot forth new branches, and long continue to bear fruit, of which you will enjoy your share: from a new one it may be long, very long, before you reap any good. Let me advise you to prefer being governed by your own countrymen, whose language, manners, and customs are congenial to you, rather than by a foreign foe, who hates the British name, and all that can remind him of British liberty; you, who are the strength and support of your country, will be the first to feel his vengeance. Expect nothing, then, from him, who thinks it is his interest to reduce your country to a desert: but should he even be disposed to be kind to you, what has he to give which Britons could ac-

cept?—Liberty? No, he detests the very name. Property? No, he will take it all to himself and his wretched slaves. Comfort? No, he has no idea of the comforts which the people of this country enjoy, nor any wish to promote them; all he covets is their wealth. Wherever he has carried his destructive arms, he has been the equal enemy of the poor and the rich; he has been in every country the destroyer of mankind, the deceitful propagator of misery and slavery. Supposing your condition, my friends, to be the worst possible, it cannot be amended by tumult and plunder: it is not by bloody revolutions, but by the gentle progress of knowledge, that the world has hitherto been improved. Remember that though from many causes your present state may not be so good as it is capable of being, yet that there is a body of enlightened men in this country who are anxious to improve it, and that even in a few years they will do more for you than a hundred revolutions or a hundred Bonapartes. Come forth, then, with all your might and with all your spirit, in defence of what is dear to us all; let us stand or fall together, for we must mutually depend upon each other. Remember that by your thus coming forward to aid, not to defend, your richer superiors, they will contract a debt of gratitude which, after the contest is over, they will not fail to repay: by your being brought nearer to each other, they will be better acquainted with your wants, your virtues, and

your condition; and by thus becoming more familiar, the distance between you will be lessened, and they will treat you with more humanity and respect, if you conduct yourselves firmly, honestly, and soberly. Society will henceforth become more harmonized from the knowledge and the remembrance of what we owe to each other; from having been engaged in the same common danger, and brought together for our common defence. We have hitherto been the envy of, and henceforth will be an example to, surrounding nations, if we succeed in preserving all that is dear to us, while they are crouching under the sword of the great despot. Stand fast, then, by the government which is able to make you comfortable; keep things together, that they may be improved, but never expect they can be so by an overthrow. Society is not the work of a day, but of ages, and it is easier to pull down than to build. In the present contest you are not fighting for the rich only, but for yourselves; for though you have less to lose, yet it is your all; and let your motto be "VICTORY OR DEATH," for life is not worth possessing in slavery.

MORPETH, Aug. 16, 1803.

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